

The Rise and Fall of Christian Ireland

Crawford Gribben

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Crawford Gribben's sweeping history surveys Ireland's grand past—and its importance for Western Christianity.

Here, religion is presented as a moving force within Irish history, which is divided into five key movements: conversion, foundation, reformations, revivals, and troubles. These periods show how Ireland's diverse culture, combined with Christian thought and expression, has always been a source of strength and redemption for the island's people.

The text begins deep in prehistoric times, when warring tribes fought over the island to which Saint Patrick brought his missionary mind, challenging the early druids. The first section probes that process of conversion, describing the great variations of belief in what would become Ireland, prior to Patrick's transformative mission. The book next explores the substantial work of monastic orders, highlighting how they helped to turn Irish Christianity into a global phenomenon, spreading their message far beyond its borders. Later chapters bring further insight into modern history, including the Catholic-Protestant troubles.

Through its fascinating historical figures, from the monk Columbanus to the scandalous Father Michael Cleary, the book includes theological and eschatological themes across the historical landscape. This is a heady book that moves through the years, considering, for example, how wave upon wave of reformation resulted in an Irish Christianity that was increasingly divided, even as it clung to its Christian heritage. Modern moves into secularism are all the more surprising because of this grounding, though Gribben notes that the Irish church was really in ruins much earlier: "caused by distortions and denials of the Gospel" and the possibility that culture rather than scripture set the agenda.

The Rise and Fall of Christian Ireland is an involving history text that shows how Ireland's cultural diversity has been a strength, resulting in a unique melding of the old with the new ways.

JEREMIAH ROOD (January / February 2022)

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